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ABSTRACT

Marin City Families First (MCFF) is an intervention program providing intensive home-based support and services to at-risk families, through family advocates, to help them stabilize their lives and increase their ability to provide safe, healthy environments for their children. Comprised of case studies of three MCFF families and their family advocates, this document describes the roles of the family advocate and program director and explores the challenges of providing comprehensive support to families and service agencies through MCFF intervention. The first family detailed in this report comprises a couple who are raising their grandchildren because the children's mother has been recently released from jail and is attending a drug recovery program. The second family comprises a single mother with three children who worked with the MCFF program to move from a life of drug dependence and despair to one of stability and self-reliance. The third family comprises a woman who is battling addiction and trying to rebuild her relationship with her husband. The case studies highlight the role of the family advocate in providing advocacy, warmth, caring, and counseling during critical times. Also described is the program director's role, which focuses on assisting community agencies in providing comprehensive services to families and children, providing clinical coordination of the cases, serving as a listener, a supporter, and a problem-solver for the family advocates as they support families. (Author)

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Marin City Families First

Implementing a Program To Improve the Lives of Families

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Marin City Families First

Implementing a Program to Improve the Lives of Families

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Introduction

Sound, ongoing relationships are the essence of Marin City Families First (MCFF), an intervention program founded in 1993 to develop a model comprehensive child and family support system for low-income communities. Family Advocates provide intensive home-based support and services to at-risk families to help them stabilize their lives and increase their capacity to provide safe, healthy environments for their children. MCFF also supports and provides guidance to the diverse and fragmented service community of Marin City and Marin County to create collaborative working agreements that support families. The unifying concepts of both efforts are support and trust. Without them, families and community agencies can not take the steps necessary to fulfill their potential.

This document consists of case studies of three MCFF families and their Family Advocates, each interviewed separately by Deborrah Bremond, a Developmental Psychologist and clinical supervisor of the Family Advocates, who is a member of the MCFF Advisory Team this year. Dr. Bremond serves as narrator between excerpts of these interviews as well. By chronicling the difficulties and desires of actual clients -- and their experiences with the program -- this report aims to clearly describe the roles of the Family Advocate and Program Director (PD) and offer insight into the challenges of providing comprehensive support to families and service agencies through MCFF intervention.

Building strong relationships requires more than just case management. Family Advocates provide advocacy, warmth, caring, and counseling during critical times. Similarly, the Program Director of the MCFF intervention assists community agencies in their effort to provide comprehensive service to the families and children of Marin City. The PD also provides clinical coordination of the cases, serving as a listener, a supporter and a problem-solver for the Family Advocates as they, in turn, support families.

MCFF's dual focus on the home and the community maximizes the benefits for children and parents. The impact of this program cannot be adequately measured in the present, for it is the future where the fruits of its labor will be fully realized -- in the hopes and dreams that each family harbors for its children.

Ruby and James: A Second Chance

Ruby and James, both 50, have been married for five years. Each has children from previous relationships. James did not raise either of his two daughters, while Ruby raised all but one of her children alone. Now, both Ruby and James are experiencing parenthood again. They are raising James' grandchildren, Alisha, 6, and Tony, 3, whose 25-year-old mother is addicted to drugs. She was recently released from jail and is also living with Ruby and James while she attends a drug recovery program.

This is the story of how Ruby and James struggle day-to-day to keep their family together, and how MCFF worked with them to sort through issues of parenting, inter-personal strife and the maze of the legal system and local social services.

Ruby: grandmother, program participant
James: grandfather, program participant
Alisha: granddaughter
Tony: grandson
Diane: mother of Alisha and Tony
Sara: family advocate
Robert: family advocate

A New Beginning: Adopting James' Grandchildren

James' grandchildren, Alisha and Tony, were living with two different sets of foster parents when Ruby learned that they were being put up for adoption. Ruby was stunned by the news, but she knew exactly what she and James had to do.

Ruby: *If we didn't go get them, they'd be adopted out to strangers. I called James and told him 'You can't let somebody else adopt your grandchildren.' He was hesitant at first but then I gave him an ultimatum to go get the children or move out. We had been married for four years at the time. That's the bloodline, the first and second grandchild.*

Ruby, who had raised her own children alone, was a deep believer in the strength and significance of family. She could not imagine James' grandchildren in foster care.

Ruby: *I called Ms. Edwards 15 times and told her I wanted both the children because I wasn't ready to separate them. I told James we have to get both of them regardless of what happens because they belong together as a unit. Alisha had never seen her brother until I went and got her and kept her out of daycare for one weekend. When they saw each other, even though she knew she had a brother but hadn't been around him, it was like a magnet.*

Transitions and Adjustments: Building a Family

Ruby took a leave of absence without pay from her job as a city bus driver, while James continued his work driving charter buses for various companies. Ruby struggled to understand each child's complicated and often troubled background: Alisha had been molested while living with her aunt; while Tony had lived with one care-giver his entire life. It was at this time that Ruby first met Sara, her Family Advocate from MCFF. Ruby says that Sara's help was critical as she tried to comprehend what the children were going through.

Ruby: *The children were so messed up when I first got them. I had to build trust and security. It was an experience for them and for us. Thank God, we made it. It's easier now. In the beginning it was beyond complicated. I can't even explain it. We had some wild days, but we made it through. If it wasn't for Sara, I don't think I would have made it.*

Sara had been working with the family since Tony was born. She knew the family history and had visited with Tony throughout his stay in foster care. She understood that the transition would be difficult for everyone involved -- not just the children and Ruby and James, but the foster parents as well.

Sara: *When I was working with Tony's foster mom who lived in Novato, the county social worker who was handling the case started talking with the foster parent about moving the children to their grandparents. The foster parent was actually considering adopting Tony, so there was some friction about whether he should be adopted by the grandparents or whether the foster parents could go ahead and adopt him. The foster mother felt that the worker had rushed the process so that the children would be adopted by the grandparents instead of her. There were implications of racial and cultural reasons for this.*

I had a discussion with the foster mother about what she envisioned regarding the challenges that would come up with Tony as he grew up and as he hit his teen years. I addressed identity issues. She talked about how she is a child of an interracial relationship -- her father is white and her mother is Central American.-- and how she incorporated this into her family system. She acknowledged that there is a difference when it comes to African Americans and how different she and Tony looked from each other. She talked about how people stare at them when they go into stores. She went through the whole gamut of noticing the differences. When she met Ruby for the first time and saw how Tony bonded with both Ruby and James, I think her fear of Tony not being in a good place started to change. I think she really loved Tony. She met him when he was two weeks old, so she was really attached to him and he was really attached to her.

Sara realized that the change would be especially trying for Tony, who was only 18 months old when the adoption took place.

Sara: *He was walking, he was doing a lot of things independently, but he was still very attached to Dorothy. The transition was very hard even though Ruby really was open to acknowledging the work that Dorothy had done. A mutual respect developed between the two women. They wanted to help each other and they both had their focus on the children. It was really a healthy transition. There were issues about race and why Dorothy couldn't have Tony. This issue was worked out with the foster care worker. The foster mother felt there was some racism involved. During the final transition they both agreed that they would keep in touch, that they would help each other, and that Ruby could call Dorothy for any kind of help that she needed.*

At the same time that there was cooperation, there was also competition between the two of them about bonding. Ruby thought Dorothy had done a good job but she really could not handle Tony. The competition manifested in some of the things that came up a couple of months after Tony got to Ruby's house. For example, he couldn't stand smoke but both James and Ruby smoked and Ruby completely denied that there was any truth to Tony's ability to tolerate smoke. In different ways they competed with each other about who was the better parent.

Ruby recognized right away that the children had emotional problems, and she knew her new parenting role would not be easy. But she was resolute. She would not give up on making the transition work.

Ruby: *Tony had a sleeping blanket that he would not turn loose. Everywhere he went, he had this little blanket he was dragging. He and Alisha couldn't stand being in a crowd of people without going off. Alisha is six and when I got her she was five, and she was at a low grade level. Even though she was in daycare when she got in kindergarten she was on a daycare level. I worked for the School Board for 11 years, so I am used to dealing with children. So I just kept saying we're going to get this; I don't care if you have a problem, we're going to keep on until we work it out. I had to reassure her when she threw a tantrum and I brought her home. She came in the house and got hysterical. She was acting like that movie "The Exorcist." I walked up and I grabbed her and hugged her and I said, 'Alisha what is wrong?' 'I want to go live with my auntie.' I told her, 'Your auntie couldn't handle you. She was going to adopt you but she changed her mind. Your last hope is me.'*

As Ruby struggled with her new role, Sara was there to help her. Sara realized that for Ruby to empathize fully with the children, she would need to know everything they had gone through. She made a point of filling Ruby in.

Sara: *The first thing that I realized when Alisha got to her grandparents' home was that neither one of them had any idea what Alisha went through. There was no actual history given to them. She just knew that she was transferred from foster parent to foster parent and that she didn't get the kind of care that Tony got. So a lot of what I did with her was give her some background on Alisha and explain to her what it feels like for a child when they keep moving, the whole bonding issue and the effect of the change in environment.*

What Tony went through was so much more stable. She didn't know anything about these issues. I think she would have understood over time, but I don't think anybody would have actually told her what happened with Alisha because the other family insisted on protecting whatever happened with her and not telling anybody about it. So when Ruby found out about the sexual abuse, she started thinking about Alisha in a different way.

When we talked about child development, we talked about how children express feelings and I worked with her on what happens to Alisha when she's expressing her feelings. I think what it did was remind Ruby of her own sexual molestation issues and how she never got to express her feelings about her experience. It brought up what she thought about little children. For example, there was no acknowledgment that children have feelings and that they process feelings. That was the biggest understanding she developed about Alisha; that she's not being personal when she's acting out sexually. We framed the issue in a different way. The more she started to separate out the real issues, the more she understood what was happening with Alisha and the more she was able to say, "OK, I can separate this from myself, although I know it affects me." What she talked about with me was how Alicia's behavior affected her.

The Family Advocate is at the core of the intense family-focused, home-based case management program. Getting to know the clients as individuals who face unique struggles is essential to the program's success. All services to the program families flow through this key MCFF staff member.

The background and training that a Family Advocate brings to the position may vary, ranging from a Bachelor's degree in a social science field to a Master's level clinician. However, the most important quality that the Family Advocate must possess is the capacity to form relationships with individuals who are typically suspicious of any outside intervention.

Sara worked with the Adoption Unit to make sure that Ruby and James received all the support services they needed. Alisha was provided with weekly play therapy to help her process the anger and rage she was experiencing. Sara helped Ruby understand the depth of Alisha's rage and to connect her to appropriate community-based agencies that could help her with the children.

As she worked to facilitate the transition, Sara found herself straddling bureaucracies in two different counties, making sure the family and the children received the support they needed.

Sara: *Marin County was in charge of all the children's needs at that point. A lot of what I did was keep in touch with the social worker who was handling the case, John was really good because he knew all the resources and he got through a lot of bureaucracy fast. John also developed a relationship with Ruby and we did home visits/meetings together often. We were able to talk to each other about how we felt, and where things were going.*

A couple of incidents happened; one incident where Alisha hit Tony and broke his tooth--and another incident where Tony's testicles were swollen and there was this idea that Alisha had mouthed him. There is still some confusion about that incident because Tony had a hernia and he needed to have an operation for it later. I think Alisha was doing sexual play with Tony. They might have been seen with their clothes off and Tony had learned to blame everything on Alisha. At that same time, the maternal family was getting angry that there were accusations of Alisha acting out on Tony. Ruby was dealing with all of this while I was trying to separate the pieces out enough so that I could ask Marin County for some kind of child/family therapy. Ruby needed support and Alisha needed therapeutic intervention.

I called John and get approval from the court so that Alisha could go to therapy, then found a therapist in the East Bay (which was hard to do) and then convinced Ruby that she had to attend the therapy with Alisha. That was difficult because Ruby felt as if she was going in a million directions and didn't have the time. I told her how important it was for her to be there, for the healing to happen. So Ruby agreed, but then the option of finding just the right therapist was a major concern. I couldn't find any therapist to match them up with. So I called around the counties and figured out who was closest to her and just got her into therapy.

An integral part of the Family Advocate's job is helping the parents negotiate the various systems (e.g. legal, social service, employment) on their own behalf. Many of the individuals in MCFF have had no role models to help them understand and navigate the various systems as they were growing up, and in many instances, the Family Advocate serves as a model for the client for how they might solve a particular problem.

Providing case management services to families in the MCFF program is wholly dependent on the ability of the Family Advocate to understand how to access and utilize community resources. Their knowledge of the resources available must be vast and constantly updated as resources change. They must know how to work within the guidelines of each of these community resources. They must be able to establish good, working relationships with the personnel from these resources and have negotiation skills so that they can advocate on their clients' behalf. On any given day, they may be addressing questions as varied as "Which doctors in the community take Medi-Cal? How do you refer an infant for developmental services through Part H? Which drug treatment programs take mothers and infants? How do you get a court date to clear up warrants?"

Unfortunately, this particular attempt by Sara to get the family the counseling they needed fell short.

Sara: *I guess it didn't work because Ruby did not quite understand what Alisha needed, or what child therapy looked like. There was a lot of talk about why is she having me in*

there, why do I have to meet with her, why can't she just see Alisha, what is this play therapy stuff anyway? She lacked an understanding of how children process their feelings and how therapists do their work. I think what came up for Ruby at that point was a lot of anger about her dealing with everything that had happened with Alisha. Ruby was upset that she was the one having to bus her around and take her to appointments and meet with therapist . But it really helped Alisha to have an outlet. It was a difficult process to pull together, but once it was set, then it was a matter of getting Ruby to go every time.

And yet Ruby was growing increasingly comfortable with the situation. She found her relationship with Sara developing into one of ''moral support and spirituality.''

Ruby: *Sara has helped me find a lot of different resources that I wasn't even aware of and she was just there for me. Any problem that came up, she was there, I'm serious. For me starting off, never being around children that had problems like these, I was ready to throw in the towel. But her encouragement and talking to her every week -- that was the best move I could have made. For instance, I would even get impatient in counseling. She was the one that helped me through that and any other little problems that might come up.*

The Stresses of Life

A year after the children came to live with their grandparents, James lost his job, so Ruby returned to work with the bus company. Ruby was sad that James was out of work, but glad that he now had a chance to see first hand what it took to take care of the children. It was at this time that Robert, the MCFF male Family Advocate, began to work with James. During his time off work, James cared for the children, but he was overwhelmed with the intensity of the responsibilities. This made it even more important for Sara to work with the Department of Social Services to find daycare for the children.

Sara: *When James lost his job, Ruby had to reconsider what to do financially. So she thought that she would probably go back to work. If she was going to go back to work, who was going to keep the children? For a while she thought James was going to keep the children and we talked about where James' head was and how young the children were and what they actually needed. We looked around the neighborhood for child care. She went to a couple of places and checked them out and talked about why she liked this one over that one.*

When we found child care, we had to work out payments with Marin County, which was a difficult process. It is a very complicated system and parents never understand it. The County says this is the money you're getting and this is what you have to do to provide all the things that you need for the child. The grandparents think they are getting the money because they're keeping a child that's not their own. So that was the battle that went back and forth. When we did locate the child care, because of their special needs, they qualified for more money, so the child care could be paid out of the grant. There was a

bit of a struggle to see how we could get those services, because Ruby couldn't afford to pay for daycare. That's how they started the child care. Then we had to figure out who was going to pick them up after child care. There was lot of organizing to be done.

Connecting clients with the services they need, as seen here, is one of the most significant aspects to a Family Advocate's work. The first step in linking families with community resources is assessing their needs and identifying the types of services that can help them. The second step, connecting them to those services, is frequently complicated by a client's reluctance to accept assistance or be referred to yet another service. Clients often fear that they will be misunderstood, and judged because they need assistance. Consequently, a Family Advocate cannot simply refer the client to another provider for assistance; often they must accompany them to an appointment to ensure that the connection occurs.

A Family Advocate frequently must help a client communicate his or her needs to a new agency and, subsequently, must help the client process that experience. In other instances, a client may feel that if they receive services from other agencies, they risk losing their Family Advocate. They must be reassured that this is not the case, and that the Family Advocate's role is to be a case manager who establishes links to the agencies.

After James lost his job, he tried to renew his commercial drivers' license and was informed that the District Attorney denied renewal because James owed child support to his ex-girlfriend. James was already paying for back child support in Marin County. Now, he was wanted in court in Contra Costa county.

Rather than try to renew his driver's license, James opted for a passive-aggressive approach: he simply decided to avoid the situation.

James: *I have been dealing with the system all my life and know how people in authority can be. You can be totally illiterate and know if you take my license that's how I make my money. How do they expect to get anything back if I can't work? So it didn't bother me at all because I know how stupid they can be. All through my life I've been preparing for tomorrow even though I may not live to get there because of a wide variety of things I've done in my life, so I'm always prepared. It didn't bother me. All they can do if they catch you driving without a license is take your car. I know how to fix cars, so I bought a $200 car and fixed it so it's OK if they take it, it's no big thing. I can still do what I've got to do. It's all learned behavior. If you believe everything somebody tells you, you'll never get anywhere. So, I know what I've got to do to get to where I want to go and I don't care about them 'cause they don't care nothing about me. I went to Vietnam twice. Went back again because I didn't believe what I was seeing the first time. I didn't believe how rough the government could be. Once I understood what I was looking at, they couldn't work me anymore because I know how they are now.*

Not wanting to give "them" the satisfaction of controlling his life, James continued to drive "fixer upper" cars that wouldn't cost him much if they were ever confiscated by the police. Robert encouraged James to take a different approach. He wanted to help James confront the problem head on. First, he walked James through the process of getting his fines cleared.

James: *Since I have come into the program, Robert has been instrumental in helping me to get my license back. He walked me through the whole process and we were fortunate enough to get a court lady who did it for us free. They were postponing me to go to court, but the lady said `well this is how you get to court right now instead of going through this long drawn out process.' So, I have nothing bad to say about the program. Robert has been more than a plus to help me get things done.*

To James' shock and delight, he soon received his commercial driver's license in the mail. That put him back on the road toward resuming his career, but would change the equation for caring for the children at home.

With Sara facilitating the child care situation, Robert and James had an opportunity to continue working on specific issues that were important to James, including his desire to go back to school to become a certified mechanic.

When MCFF began, all of the program's Family Advocates were women because most of their clients were women. However, it became apparent that while many of the fathers of children in the program's families did not live in the home, some were involved with their children and others wished to become involved, but did not know how to do so. Family Advocates increasingly needed to address the very different issues of fathers and other male relatives who were involved in children's lives.

A male Family Advocate was hired specifically to focus on the issues that fathers experience in the context of the family. In particular, they needed assistance in navigating the social service system, but also in learning how to express their feelings about their relationships with their children and other family members.

The Program Director recognized the need for a male Family Advocate to work with the men involved with MCFF families and hired the male Family Advocate in early 1996. The addition of a male advocate has been a key resource for MCFF. By working weekly with all the advocates, the director has a critical vantage point from which to assess the broader needs of the program. He integrates that knowledge with his evaluation of the various resources available in the community and the matrix of social services. He then works with advocates on strategies for their cases.

The Family Advocate described his task as that of "helping fathers to develop a vision of what they want and where they want to go," a process that is expedited by helping the fathers learn how to verbalize what they want to achieve. He used his

own experiences as a father and a black man to build relationships with the men in the program. An important aspect of working with the men in the program was helping them to define their role and relationship to their children.

One of the male Family Advocate's primary tasks was to connect the men to appropriate services. For example, many fathers needed help clearing up tickets. He tried to help the men develop an understanding of cause and effect relationships, e.g., "If I do this, then I can expect this to happen." These fathers also often needed help making appointments and negotiating the legal system. The male Family Advocate found that frequently he had to confront the fathers' misconception about working within the system.

James is a laid-back, easy-going individual who has learned over the years how to temper his rage. He took a philosophical view of his dealings in court.

James: *You have to feel free to really be free. People will tell you anything to get what they want. Doesn't have to be the truth, no validity, nothing. In court they have a big sign up on the wall: 'Do not talk crazy to these people,' but the workers in court talk crazy to you. The government will cut my arms off, cut my legs off, poke my eyes out and go tell me to go get a glass of water for them. That's crazy. It don't work like that. I talked just as stupid to them because I don't respect anyone who won't respect me; I don't care who they are. If that's the way they want to do it, it doesn't matter to me, because you can't stop me from going where I want to go.*

Sara clearly saw the benefits of having a male colleague on hand to work with James.

Sara: *It was such a blessing to have Robert come in. I could not deal with James' stuff. James needed somebody and every time I tried to work with him, there would be a million things to work on. I could not go to Contra Costa with him or contact the court people. I stayed on the phone for a long time trying to get through. So when Robert came I was so happy.*

Robert was able to assist James with his needs. That was really wonderful and Robert was on top of it. He was young so he wasn't bogged down with any other thoughts in his head and he was very clear with James about what needed to be done. He also set an example for how to deal with the county. He had a very relaxed manner with James and was able to hang out with him and talk to him about everything. James continued to process his feelings with me. He always came back and talked to me about what he was feeling about Ruby or what he was feeling about the children being there. It was interesting. But he depended on Robert 150% when it came to dealing with the county. He really saw the value in the way Robert was showing him: 'Yes, they messed you over, but this is how you can get it back.' So it was a blessing. I did not worry about James. As long as Robert was there I did not worry about him.

This is an example of male and female Family Advocates working in unison for the

sake of the whole family. Such collaboration is crucial, but isn't always easy. The relationship between the male Family Advocate, who advocated on behalf of the fathers, and the female Family Advocates, who advocated on behalf of the mothers, was at first difficult. When two advocates were working with one "case," advocating on behalf of two different individuals, from two different perspectives, they often found themselves in adversarial roles. For example, the female client of one advocate may be working toward gaining independence from the child's father, while the male client may decide his goal is a closer relationship with his child and her mother. Advocates had to confront such questions as "Is unification of the family the best solution? Who is the client -- the family, the children, the woman, the man?"

After a year, Family Advocates made progress toward resolving their conflicts through careful communication. On several occasions, the male Family Advocate teamed up with a female advocate to provide services to a husband and a wife. They recognized that in working together on behalf of shared clients, they needed to clearly communicate with one another about what issues they were targeting and how they would communicate with the families about their objectives and roles.

One central issue Robert helped James target, was his desire for career advancement. He helped him to identify schools in the area and visited them with James. James decided to return to Sequoia Mechanics School.

James: *It was a mechanics' school. I can get a license and be just like those folks organizing a business.. People don't look at you as a shade tree mechanic when you've got papers. Yeah, Robert helped me apply to school and for a Pell Grant. Then I had to take an entrance exam. I hadn't been to school in 33 years. Everything worked out all right.*

James, the oldest in his class, will finish school in late 1997, but his return to the classroom hasn't been easy.

James: *It's harder to absorb things and I needed glasses to be able to read. I'm old enough to be the teacher's father. My ability to recall is not there anymore. I used to run 20 miles; now I can't walk 20 blocks. I'm not saying that I'm old, but I have more miles on me than most people in school. The teacher has slowed down for me and I am gradually getting it. It just takes more time.*

Ruby is proud that James has defined a dream and is pursuing it. The couple has figured out a way to rework their budget until James finishes school. They have taken control of their lives, and both are grateful to their Family Advocates for helping them reevaluate their situation and take constructive steps toward their goals.

Recovery and Healing: A Family Process

When Alisha and Tony's mother, Diane, was released from the county jail, Ruby and James invited her to stay with them. Diane was eight months pregnant, and Ruby and James worried about her baby's prenatal exposure to drugs. They were trying to connect Diane with prenatal services.

For Ruby, Diane's predicament was not too far afield. There was a time, years ago, when she too battled a drug addiction.

Ruby: *I was down that road too and it's only God's grace and mercy that got me here. I sold drugs, I used drugs, but God saved me. I've been born again for five years and ever since, I've been clean. I never looked back. My children were sheltered. They were with my mother and never saw me in that state. My daughter knew when she was 7 that I was on drugs and her father turned me out. We never subjected her to it. She knew I was on crack but she was never there. So God didn't take me to the level he took Diane. I could have lost my daughter, but I didn't. God's grace and mercy saved me. So I can sympathize with her to a degree. When you lose control, you want to do right but you can't do right. It's powerful. I'm serious, you are out of your mind and out of control. How can I judge her? God is judge enough. And if she is ready to surrender her life to Jesus and be straight, I love her enough to want to give her children back to her. But, if she's not right, don't even think about it. These children won't go anywhere. But she is making a positive move now; God is really filling her. We have been to church three days this week and God did a work on her Sunday; he is purging her.*

My husband has not been to church. I can get him to go every now and then, but I told him you've got to set the example. I am tired of carrying the weight. If you don't know your role, then I cannot function in my capacity if you're not gaining where God wants you to. But it was a beautiful sight; grandchildren, father and daughter for the first time under one roof. This is all new for all of them. I thank God he is using me to bond this family. My husband is being a better father and a better husband. Diane is going to be a wonderful mother. She is already good with the children. She has patience where I don't. I might be tired and so it's a blessing for her to be here too.

Ruby believes that the Alisha and Tony will benefit from their relationship with their biological mother. She does not worry that the children will become confused over who is really in charge.

Ruby: *They are not confused; it is a void they have been missing. All this anger that was in Alisha is because no one ever told her why she was moving from place to place. When I got them I took them to church and prayed, 'Lord I don't know what to do with these children. These are young children and I'm bringing them to you, Lord, and I'm giving them back to you. I'm expecting you to help me with them.' I took them to the altar and got them anointed.*

Ruby feels it is her responsibility to make sure the children understand and appreciate the importance of family. She wants them to know their maternal and paternal grandparents, their aunts and uncles, their mother and father. She also wants them to know how much she cares about them.

Ruby: *'I'm not your bloodline but I love you as mine and everybody sees it. And when you go out the door, they don't know if you're poor or not because you look as good as any of the other little children out there. You got more than my children had when they were growing up, OK? You and Tony have your own private room; you have a blessing. I'm older now and I've got more time, whereas when my children were little, I was tired. There's a lot of things my children had to do that you don't have to do. They had chores. You don't have chores. Just keep your bed made up and hang up your clothes from school, that's all. I want you to know one thing. I'm here to help you and whatever it takes, I'm going to do that, Alisha, so lets make it better for each other. You realize my goal here. I'm not your mama, I'm not your grandma. I married your grandfather. But God got me standing in the gap. The reason you're not with your mother is cause your mother is sick right now and I say God put me here. But one day you and your mother will be back together.' She hugged and kissed me and said, 'I love you Mama.' I said, 'I love you too and I hate to be the one that dropped this on you.' But I had to drop it on her because she was trying me and she didn't really understand why she was here and I had to just break it down.*

When I first got her it was rough. I don't know her anymore, she is so sweet. I really feel in my spirit that her problems came because she was missing her mother, but she had no way of communicating and letting anyone know, and no one had ever talked to her. At first she was really angry. She didn't have the words for her anger and she didn't understand why she kept getting moved around so much. Then she knew her mom had a problem. I asked her, 'How would you like your mommy to come to church with us?' Her attitude changed and she couldn't wait until her mommy got out of jail. It's been a blessing for them to bond again, plus my husband had never been with his daughter since she was a little girl. It's a blessing for us. There's a lot of healing going on in this house for the grandchildren and for the daughter. I thank God he used me to bring them together.

Ruby's family is her top priority, one that guides all her decision-making. Significant changes have occurred in her family recently, and Ruby's life has changed significantly as a result.

Ruby: *My life changed all the way around. It's always about the children. I have put myself aside and everything I do revolves around them and James. When I get tired or burned out, then James knows he has to watch them, because I have to go off by myself. Diane is now back in their lives and that has been a blessing too.*

Ruby is praying for Diane's recovery. But she has also been clear about laying down the rules now that Diane is back at the house.

Ruby: *'These are the guidelines: We are going to church. You must try and get your life back on track, because I cannot let you back in my children' life if you're going out there and using that stuff.' So there was an understanding from the start. She delivered her baby in jail. She misses her children, and just because she made a mistake, she shouldn't have to pay for it for the rest of her life. I am here to intercede for this family until they can get back together.*

Sara also stepped in to communicate with Diane about her recovery. But Diane was not always responsive.

Sara: *She said, `I don't want to.' So when Diane went to jail, before I even knew that Ruby was going to have her come live with her, I visited Diane in jail. It was always an open relationship. I heard from Diane that she might be going to live with Ruby. When I talked to Ruby I knew it wasn't going to be easy to get her to think about what exactly she was doing. The idea of getting the whole family together was complicated by the loss of her own daughter and the transition she was going through, the fact that she was having Tony and Alisha live with her because their mother was addicted to drugs. And there was a chance to make this new baby clean. Ruby believed that she had God working through her and that she needed to give back to the community by helping pregnant women have clean babies. Ruby felt she was on a mission from God. There was no way to discuss these topics rationally. I tried to get her to think about what that would mean for the children, but she was in total denial. It was an uphill battle. The only thing I could say to her was that there would be complications and to keep talking to me about it.*

When Diane got there, the first couple of weeks was like a honeymoon; they loved each other. I think I facilitated three meetings between them -- James, Ruby and Diane. It was a very difficult process because this was Diane's first time living with her father and there was this bonding that was happening with them. Ruby was feeling out of place; all the feelings about being the oldest child, and taking care of the whole family, came up for her. So there were too many things going on, and there was no way to figure out how to deal with it. It finally did blow up and Diane left. Ruby and James had to re-establish who they were and what their relationship was, how much value they put on that relationship, and whether they wanted to rescue his daughter too. I think if I wasn't there it would have been a disaster. They were arguing about everything. I had never heard Ruby cuss until that point and she cussed like a sailor. She was mad, really mad. There were a lot of tears; there was a lot of anger. James was mad. Diane was mad. Ruby was mad. It was a tough time.

Diane had the baby and the baby was clean. Diane's totally bonded. It's working out really well. They're figuring out ways for the children to visit Diane, and stay days. Ruby is very open to the idea. Ruby can't give the foster care money to anybody else and she does take care of the children so she should have it. I think there's a lot of jealousy about Ruby from the maternal side of the family. I think that Ruby is not thinking clearly about what it means to expose the children to that environment. Diane is living in Marin

City by herself, in her own place. She's doing well. She's actually in a childcare training program right now. The outcome is actually quite good, looking at the family on all fronts, but it's still a struggle.

Ruby has become very attached to Tony, and she worries about who will ultimately take care of the children. Ruby feels that if Diane can stabilize her life, she should have her children back. She thinks that Alisha would be better off with her mother, but she feels differently about Tony.

Ruby: *If I have to raise the children, I will, but, I believe children need to be with their mother. I would never return them to her until I am sure that she can handle it and she is ready. Until she is ready, I'll be there. I let the children know, 'I'm not your mother; I am your grandma and your mama too until your mama can take care of you.' Alisha told Tony that he has two mamas and Tony said, 'My mama is in jail.' He's a character. Tony has never been around her. He is still such a baby; he still clings to me. But he clings to both of us. He is getting used to her. Everybody says I got him spoiled, but that's my baby; that's the way we bonded. He missed this when he was in his mama's womb and that's why he loves me -- because this love that he missed -- I gave it to him. He knows who she is and he loves her, but I am his mama too, and until he can separate the two, he's got two mamas. This is a positive thing. I'm not selfish; he can call me mama, he can call me grandma, it doesn't matter. In my heart, if she continues the way she is going and keeps herself clean, yes, I will give her children back to her. She loves them; she just made a mistake. A demon had her and she wasn't in her right mind.*

James is also optimistic about the future, for the children and for himself, and he is getting another chance at parenthood.

James: *There are so many firsts in your life, you just keep living. So, I just go where Ruby tells me.' Just go with the flow. I change my mind half the time. I don't have a problem with any of it. This is all good for them and good for me. I'm getting a chance to do something I didn't get to do before. Instead, I get to do it at a later date and I am blessed for that.*

James has been in close contact with his daughters of late. He tries to give them some fatherly advice:

James: *I am all they've got, what could they do? I love them both dearly and I wish them the best. I always sit down and talk to them and tell them there's no need for them to go through that. No way could you live through what I've been through. Just deal with the karma, not what you wish it could be. It's going to be what it is; you have to adjust to that.*

Playing a diversity of roles is a challenge for any Family Advocate. But Sara was aided by the fact that Ruby and James were dedicated to making changes, and eager to work

closely with the program. The regular meetings she held with the family reflected the deep commitment to the program on both sides.

Sara: *First of all, the meetings always lasted more than an hour -- usually two or three hours. I went there on a Monday morning and I did not get back to my office until one o'clock. I worked a lot with this family. We would start by checking in on resources, asking, `Have you done your part,' and have I done my part in discussing progress on an issue. That's where the therapeutic piece come in. It's similar to therapy; the beginning and the ending. We talked about feelings, we'd figure out what's happening, and what we're going to do. Ruby is a very resourceful woman; she's very smart, she knows how to deal with the system. She is not one of those parents that I have to take by the hand. We would discuss things that needed to be done and she would have a part and I would have a part and then we'd reinforce what we each were doing. It was very clear with this family; they kept their appointments, I met them every week. There was progress from week to week. There were things discussed and things built upon each other and there were no big lags where you had to go back to square one. There was definite movement in a positive direction. This was an older couple and they weren't struggling for money. I think that made a huge difference compared to my other families. Both grandparents had long work histories and they understood how to solve problems in the world. The job that Ruby had offered her seniority, and she could choose the hours, which contributed to the consistency of the meetings. With most of my other families, the problem was that they were always struggling at the very bottom, but this family wasn't at that level. It made a huge difference.*

When it came time to end the service, Sara realized that she and Ruby had developed a bond that would not easily break.

Sara: *I tried to terminate contact but I don't feel like it's really terminated. Ruby still calls me and says, `I know you didn't forget me stranger.' And I call her back and check in with her. I've also been trying to get her into therapy. I told her that there would be somebody else taking my place. And I told her that there might be a chance for a friendship between us. But Ruby said to me, `you know, you're part of the family and you're not going anywhere.' But I did notice that the family is at a point where they are pretty empowered to be on their own. So the end of service came at a perfect time. It was almost a natural ending because we were already slowing down on the home issues -- it wasn't such a huge loss. And also there was this feeling that she would always be able to contact me if need be. I am a little worried about Ruby at times though because she has very few boundaries, and she's an older woman. She gets hurt a lot.*

Sara believes that Ruby would be able to work effectively with another Advocate, but she is not sure Ruby wants to do that right now.

Sara: *I think she feels like she's got it pretty much together. With the legal settlement she had, she feels a little more powerful about being able to maneuver.*

Ruby and James were both deeply grateful for MCFF. The program has helped them gain a better understanding of themselves and their loved ones. And most importantly, it has given them the tools they need to keep the family together, even under the most trying conditions.

Ruby: *I don't know what we would have done without them. They do everything they possibly can to help you. It has been a blessing. I know other people in San Francisco who are in the same situation as us (grandparents as second parents) and they don't get the same kind of help. I was wiped out. I did not feel like calling to make all those appointments, but the program staff helped to keep us plugging along with all the ups and downs, making sure that we received the help that we needed. This program has been a blessing in our life.*

Eleanor: Standing on My Own

Eleanor came to the Marin City Families First program in 1992, addicted to drugs and defeated by the pressures of single-parenthood. She was a young mother of two small children, with a third child from an unknown father on the way. She had no job and no prospects. What little money she had, she frittered away on crack cocaine. Eleanor could hardly care for herself, let alone her children. They stayed with Eleanor's mother, who was also hooked on drugs.

After five years with MCFF, however, Eleanor has turned herself around. Working closely with Family Advocates, Eleanor has moved from a life of drug dependence and despair to one of stability and self-reliance. Her dramatic transition illustrates an important point: the most successful Family Advocates are those who not only give their clients support, but who help them learn to advocate for themselves.

Eleanor: single mother, program participant
Jennae: daughter of Eleanor
Brenda: daughter of Eleanor
Jonathan: son of Eleanor
Lara: family advocate
Shannon: family advocate
Sally: family advocate
Suzette: family advocate

The Early Years in Marin City

Eleanor's experiences with both the pressures and the pleasures of family life stretch back to her own childhood in Marin City. Her parents divorced when Eleanor was young, leaving Eleanor's mother to support the family on her own.

Eleanor: *My mother worked all her life. She worked from 3 p.m. until midnight. So we stayed with my grandmother until we were 13 or 14. My grandmother lived in Marin City and my dad's grandparents owned Hayden's Market, the only market in Marin City. We grew up with my grandmother and my uncle. My sister Pauline and I are very close. We are only nine months apart. My mom did a good job with us, being a single parent and knowing my father was around. She raised us well. She had some strict rules. We didn't get away with too much. When we moved back home with my mom, my grandmother hated that. We didn't have to want for anything. My mother made sure we had everything. We were in the house by ourselves, but we had neighbors watching. My sister and I learned at a young age how to take care of ourselves, how to cook and clean. My mother was not on aid or welfare. She worked all that time with us.*

I had a lot of problems in school. I was always the rebellious one. Getting in trouble, getting kicked out of school. I went to Redwood High School and got in trouble there and

then to Tamalpais High School and got in trouble there so I went to Miwok Alternative High School. I had good grades, but my temper was so bad. So I graduated from Miwok and my sister graduated from Tam and went to San Jose State. I was left at home to take care of my mom.

The Road to Hitting Bottom

Eleanor missed her sister terribly, and felt stifled in Marin City. Though she loved her mother, their relationship soon began to deteriorate. It fell apart completely when both women slipped deeply into drug addiction.

Eleanor: *When I was about 17 or 18 everything went bad. I got into drugs and my mom was also using at the time. She was a diabetic and she kept getting sick. She was involved in a violent relationship. I had a chance to go to school in Louisiana, but my mother kept getting sick. I had a job and went to the College of Marin. I worked for the US Army Corps of Engineers office. I had that job for a year, but I was still using crack, alcohol and cocaine. Before crack was even out, I used powdered cocaine. It was fun at first. My mom was using, I was using and it was all pretty dysfunctional. She stopped using on her own, but I kept going. She didn't say for me to stop using until I got pregnant with my second child.*

I had my first child in 1988. I had stopped using with her. I was 18 and I stayed clean by myself for about two years. Jennae was not born toxic. I was involved in a very dysfunctional relationship with her father; we fought a lot. He was a drug dealer so I had access to his drugs. I took myself to another level with that. My house got raided about three times by the Drug Task Force. I've been in jail around ten times for petty stuff. So I got evicted from my apartment. When I moved, I lived upstairs from my mother. I didn't go anywhere. I never left Marin City. When I got pregnant with Brenda, I was lazy. I didn't feel like getting an abortion. I started going to Marin Maternity Services for Women. They provided my prenatal care. I went there every appointment. I didn't use everyday. I would use one day, take a break for a couple of days and then go on a binge. My mom was mad at me, but she couldn't say too much because she let it go on for so long. We fought and I got put out of the house about five or six times. I went to a battered women's shelter, just to have somewhere to stay for a week.

Eleanor's mother somehow managed to sober up on her own. But Eleanor didn't. Her drug habit worsened, as did her fights with her mother, who frequently kicked Eleanor and the children out of house, only to invite them back each time.

Eleanor: *After she would get mad, my mother would come looking for me. She would say that she wasn't going to let her grandchildren live out on the streets.*

When Eleanor's second child, Brenda, was born, CPS decided that Eleanor needed to be monitored. The children's father was now in a recovery program in Marin County. But Eleanor felt that recovery programs weren't for her.

Eleanor: *I didn't know a thing about recovery. My children' father went through a 12-step program. It was sticking in my mind -- 'I don't need that crap' -- so CPS referred me to Marin Treatment Center. I went there high half the time. I didn't get in trouble; I was on probation. I figured who cared, so I continued using. I stole money from my mother. I wouldn't go into stores and steal, but I'd steal from my mother. Not from anybody else, just her. I was out there doing all kinds of scamming with my body. So, I got pregnant with Jonathan; didn't know who his father was, still don't know, don't have a clue, and I'm not even searching or trying to find out about it. I was about three months pregnant with Jonathan when I found out. I was going to get an abortion, but as soon as I heard his heartbeat, I couldn't do it. Just send me to a treatment center, somewhere.*

Marin City Families First: The Road to Recovery

Eleanor's dramatic turn-around began when an MCFF Family Advocate assessed her situation and recommend that Eleanor go to a residential treatment program. Eleanor was reluctant to leave her children while they were so young, and hoped to find a program that would let her bring the children along. Eleanor's MCFF advocate helped find a program in San Francisco that would do just that.

Eleanor: *I don't know how I got involved with MCFF, I really don't know. I was on drugs that day. Faye Crutchfield, a worker in a Marin City social services agency, referred me to MCFF. I was using drugs and alcohol and pregnant with my third child. I was at the end of my rope when I got pregnant for the third time. I did not know what to do. My life was a living hell. I was in denial about my drug addiction. I said OK, I'm going to go to a program. So finally I had hit rock bottom.*

My advocate referred me to a program called Jelani House and that's when my recovery began. I left Feb. 22, 1992. The day I left for the program, my mother cried. That was the first step -- that I wanted some help. It was hard to get adjusted. I went there and I don't even remember the first three months at Jelani House. My children were there and then they were gone. That's all I remember. Three months without talking to your family is pretty hard. But they let me talk to my children. So my mother went there to drop off my check. They take 80 percent of your money in the treatment program. My mother was upset. She said, 'No, she is coming home.' I told my mother no. After five months of me being in the program, she could see the difference; she saw the way I was looking. She came and got the children on the weekends when I first got there. My children are used to running around. So she asked, can I take care of them until you get out? And I said yes. And they said, you're lucky because some people's parents won't go for that one.

Eleanor: *After three months, Lara (the MCFF Family Advocate) got in touch with me. She came to visit with me at Jelani House.*

Lara remained in touch with Eleanor and her children as she began the residential treatment program. It soon became clear that the rigors of recovery were too much for Eleanor with the children around.

Eleanor: *It was difficult with the children, and being pregnant. The structure there was hard, getting up at 5 am. During the time at Jelani House, I got a lot of counseling plus I had some support from Families First.*

After spending two weeks with their mother in the program, the children returned to their grandmother's home in Marin City. Thanks to Lara, CPS was not called on to place her children. Instead, Lara facilitated a process that allowed Eleanor to transfer her AFDC check to her mother while she cared for the children. But there was another issue: What would Eleanor do after she finished the program? MCFF Family Advocates were there to help Eleanor work that out.

Eleanor: *I graduated from Jelani House in 1994. I was in there for 18 months. They provided me with a Section 8 voucher. That's how I got this apartment. They gave me $1,200 to move in. So I moved in here and I was still talking to Lara. Shortly after moving into this apartment, Lara left MCFF and I got Shannon [a new Family Advocate]. Shannon started coming two months after I moved in. She was here every week offering to help with things. Not telling me, but referring me to go back to school and find a job. I wasn't ready because I had just got the girls back. They stayed with my mother for 18 months. Then they moved into my house at the beginning of the school year. That was hard.*

Having her children back home was much harder than Eleanor had imagined. She had never really been the primary care-giver. Brenda, the oldest, had lived mostly with her grandmother since birth. Now, at night Brenda would cry and say, "I want to go home to Grandma's."

Eleanor: *Brenda was especially close to my mother; that's what happened through my addiction - she was always the one there. Shannon and I worked close together. She was here every week helping me out. It was important, because I was new to San Francisco and didn't know anything. I was scared to even unlock the door, so she came around and helped me out. She connected me to a lot of services -- the Children's Hotline -- that one helped me a lot. We talked about how hard it was to have my children back. Shannon and I talked about my addiction and talked about my sobriety and focused on staying clean.*

Five months after Eleanor left the residential treatment program, Shannon, her Family Advocate at the time, left MCFF. Sally, a new Family Advocate, came to work with Eleanor. She helped Eleanor focus on the future.

Eleanor: *When Sally came, she was the one who put the food on the table. She would talk to me about doing something with my life. I was scared to go back out there and try it again, because I kept failing because of my addiction. And Sally would say, 'You have to make a decision.' At the time, I didn't know what I wanted to do. Should I go back to school or go find a job?. I didn't have childcare at the time, because my son was only one, and we were trying every place. We called the Children's Council and they were saying I couldn't participate. GAIN (Greater Avenues toward Independence, a state-run welfare-to-work program) was saying no, I couldn't participate because my son was too young. I got discouraged because they kept telling me I couldn't do it, because I had a problem with the childcare. Sally and I worked closely. I was going to the Family Hotline and talking to Debra, a counselor there. I didn't have enough willpower at the time. I was tired, the children were always upset and arguing, and I was all burned out.*

Eleanor was finally sober. She was exploring her relationship with her children, her mother and her sister. And soon she began a new relationship with a man. It was the first romance Eleanor had experienced that wasn't fueled by drugs. It went well at first. Tyrone was kind to Eleanor and fond of her children. But he was having another relationship on the side, and unbeknownst to Eleanor, was the father of a newborn son. When Eleanor learned about Tyrone's other life, she was so devastated she was sure all the progress she had made would come undone.

Eleanor: *My sobriety was threatened and my self-esteem was back in that old pity mode.*

Eleanor decided that she would pull herself together by going back to work. She had been out of the treatment program for two years. It was time to get on with her life.

Eleanor: *I called GAIN and I told them I needed to do something. I'm tired of sitting around. They said, "Your son is only two years old." I said, "Ma'am, I'm asking to do something," and she said, "OK, I'm going to sign you up for GAIN." So I couldn't wait. I was impatient and nervous and I was still trying to get this relationship off my mind. So I started GAIN July 29th of this year. I thought I could not adjust to getting up. I just wanted to sleep. Two years ago, even a year ago, I'd be asleep. So I had to get adjusted to getting back up. I had to take two children to school. It was not easy.*

I went to GAIN. That was the best step of my life. I felt good. I had a chance to work on all of my skills. I got computer skills, so I was looking for an office job. But I couldn't find one because my skills weren't high enough, even though I had a high school diploma and a year of college. It took me almost three weeks to find a job and that's amazing because it take some people months. I went for twelve interviews.

The GAIN program helped Eleanor with childcare and gave her a Fast Pass to get around town for job interviews:

Eleanor: *I ran across a lot of interesting people. I got a second interview at a stock brokerage firm, and I felt good about the interview. By the time I got the job I'm in now, I felt good about things. I had another job interview at an architecture company and he said I just needed a few more skills -- I'm trainable. The job I got was through the Employment Development Department. The job was as a locker room attendant. I had to clean out the locker room. But I didn't mind at the time -- anything to get me going. So I went in for my interview and it went smooth. The first interview, I was nervous, I was sweating. I didn't get discouraged after that. I kept going on interviews. When they asked me back for a second interview, I was sitting up tall, smiling and waving at everybody. There was the boss and the manager; the lady that hired me was Melissa. I told her everything about me. 'I have children and these hours are acceptable for me because it's from 12 - 5 and I can work with that.' So it took a week and a half for them to call me back. I left an impression on them. Some other people were also going up for this job but she called me and said they had to go check on me with the Department of Justice. I didn't know how big the company was until I got hired there. This was a big company. I went to work August 22.*

Eleanor found a job in less than a month. And her counselor at GAIN was encouraging her to keep moving forward with her life.

Eleanor: *She told me, 'I know you can find a job. You have a lot of potential -- just don't let anybody discourage you.' I love my job. It gets boring sometimes, but I like all of it. The past two months I've been working there, my boss is impressed. I came there knowing nothing. I'm painting, I'm fixing locks on the door, I'm doing the baseboards on the wall. At first I was a locker room attendant, but now I'm a club attendant. On Nov. 18th, I get a raise and extra hours.*

Who Will Pay for Daycare?

At first, the GAIN program subsidized Eleanor's daycare. But Eleanor's GAIN counselor failed to let her know that after 90 days on her new job, her subsidy would end. Eleanor's case was transferred to the Department of Social Services. DSS would pay half of Eleanor's child care costs, but Eleanor would have to pay the rest. It was money Eleanor simply didn't have.

Eleanor: *They called me. I just found this out yesterday; I've been stressed out since yesterday. I will have to pull my children out of school because the school is too expensive. They should have told me when I first put them in there that the rate was too high. It's actually a private childcare center and so the total amount of money is around $1,700 a month. GAIN misleads people; they not only misled me but they had me feeling that childcare wouldn't be much of a problem. They give out fast passes, but once you find a job, you have to provide your own fast pass -- so that's $35 a month. Then childcare has to come out of your pocket for half the money.*

I talked to the owner of Catherine Michaels childcare program; she works with the children, too. She doesn't care if she doesn't get half of the money right now because she feels my children shouldn't be taken out of school. Brenda was very shy when she got there. She didn't speak to anyone. Nobody. She'll play, but she's not going to talk to you. Now she is making friends. She's getting invited to birthday parties, sleepovers; she knows everybody in the whole school. Jonathan is two and he is potty trained. When he walked in the door, they started potty training him. The very first day, no diapers. They get to make accidents. He comes home, takes off his diaper and uses the bathroom.

Eleanor couldn't afford child care. But she also couldn't afford to take her children out of such a constructive environment. It was a difficult bind, which Eleanor's new Family Advocate, Suzette, helped Eleanor work through. In this crucial point in Eleanor's transition, Suzette knew it was important to keep Eleanor focused on positive thoughts and effective problem-solving strategies.

Suzette: *I started to work with Eleanor when she was working at the Fillmore Center, at the cleaning job. At that time she was working at the athletic club. She was still making the transition to having her children and working, trying to organize her time, trying to budget the money she was making. She was paying as much as she could to Catherine Michaels. When I first came in, I introduced myself and went over her feelings about having so many family advocates. I talked about what I would be working on with her and just tried to understand her goals. She was pretty motivated. She was very organized in scheduling her children. So she was very stressed about what was happening with GAIN, not knowing if she was going to be able to have childcare. They told her to continue working and they would continue to pay for the childcare.*

Since she had not been working with Eleanor when the GAIN arrangement was made, Suzette first had to learn all she could about Eleanor's childcare situation. She also wanted to learn more about Eleanor herself.

Suzette: *I asked her about her time in Jelani. I got information about who she was connected with at GAIN, and what she knew about GAIN , whether they pay for childcare, what happens after this program ends. I wanted to see what information she already had and what she knew about the program.*

A good pair of ears may be the most important tool required of a Family Advocate. It is critical to be able to listen to the client and understand not only their immediate needs, but also where they've been and where they hope to go. In establishing a working relationship, the Family Advocate jointly defines with the client the nature of tasks and the activities they will pursue. Together they develop both a short-term, day-to-day plan as well as longer-range plans.

In the short-term, they may consider "survival" issues -- safety, shelter, food and finances. Activities may include setting up a WIC appointment, finding child care, going to the pharmacy to pick up medicine for a sick child, keeping medical

appointments, supporting a parent's decision to get an abortion, going to court (CPS, tickets etc.), going grocery shopping, helping a mother get a restraining order in a domestic violence case or helping a client fill out a form. Longer term issues may include decisions about becoming involved in a substance abuse program, attending school, seeking employment training, or joining a parenting group.

In listening to her travails, Suzette realized that Eleanor did not have an accurate picture of how GAIN was going to help her.

Suzette: *She thought that GAIN was paying for childcare. But she didn't know how expensive it was because she had always received subsidized childcare. She thought that she would be able to get the subsidy through the school or get scholarships. We were trying to deal with what's going to happen at this moment. And at this time, we knew paying for childcare was a top priority.*

Suzette knew that Eleanor's frustrations and fears about childcare were discouraging her and threatened to interfere with the important transition she was making. She wanted to help Eleanor stay focused on her goals.

Suzette: *She was really stressed. And she was thinking, "Why am I doing this? Why am I going back to work? It's not worth it. I send most of my paycheck to childcare." So we talked a lot about the decisions that she made, her goals, her wanting to find a job. She got her children back. I talked a lot about the strength that she had in keeping everything maintained. It was a big transition she made.*

As Suzette soon realized, Eleanor's dealings with Social Services' were only adding to her stresses.

Suzette: *They weren't doing anything. GAIN told her she's no longer in the program now that she's working, and she was able to get supplemental child care. This means she would have to pay $600 up front and they would reimburse her for it. But that was almost her entire pay check.*

Eleanor had some bouts with Social Services. She would call them up and tell them what her situation was and they would ask her if she had any family members to take care of the children. And she would get angry because her family was back in Marin City, which she had left deliberately to rid herself of the drug culture. The whole time this was going on she was saying, "What is the use of working?" She felt deceived.

MCFF works to alleviate this kind of frustration by focusing much of its efforts on establishing a working partnership with the various agencies and services upon which its clients rely. The Program Director continually fosters relationships with people in other community agencies. The PD must understand and be sensitive to the unique characteristics of the local community. MCFF recognizes that its model cannot be static -- just as the community that is its focus is a dynamic entity, the

staff must continually evolve and adapt to changing situations around them.

This position requires constant attention to the intervention's dual goals of providing direct assistance to families while implementing a service support strategy for the community's families. The latter (called, "Prong II") means that the PD in particular, must have a more global perspective to ensure that the families don't get defeated by the clash of agencies.

In Marin City itself, Prong II needed to be developed from a rapidly evolving array of programs and services that were already available. The PD helped create a Community Services Support System -- which, by working to overcome bureaucratic disparity among agencies -- can create a long-term framework to focus directly on the needs of Marin City children and families. It is a process that has developed over several years. Poor communication, misunderstanding of the culture of Marin City, inadequate leadership and a lack of financial investment were particularly daunting hurdles to overcome.

And at the same time that Marin City's agencies were caught in a struggle for financial survival, the long-standing problems of severe poverty, substance abuse and unemployment continued to plague many residents.

Back on the front lines, Eleanor was disheartened by her prospects of finding affordable child care. Rather than get bogged down dwelling on the negative, Suzette helped turn Eleanor's thoughts toward what needed to be done.

Suzette: *We talked a lot about what we needed to do now. We had to make some decisions because they were going to make her responsible for the childcare payments. She found a school, Audrey L. Smith, for her oldest daughter. But in the meantime they were trying to work something out for her son. I had contacted the Child Care Law Center to see what they could work out with GAIN and to see what portion of the childcare they were legally responsible for. GAIN gave us an idea what the pay rate was, and what subsidies the mother would be eligible for. They agreed to make the contact and see what was going on with her case. Apparently they were going through some transitions themselves with a change in staff so it took a while for them to give us any information. I made several more calls to GAIN and I called the Child Care Network Referral, which is connected with the GAIN program. They wanted her to find child care right away, and it was very difficult to find. She also asked them if they had any listings of places, and they were very helpful with that.*

Since her daughter was in Audrey L. Smith, which has several different schools, I called the other sites that serve her other child's age to see if they had any openings. I talked to one of the teachers there and gave a brief overview of what was happening with the mother. She said they had a space for this child, and to have the mother call to set something up. That's when I called Eleanor and told her that they have a space for her

child. She called and set it up. The children were set up with year-round child care, which relieved her worries about what she was going to do for the summer.

Eleanor also spoke to the owner of the child care center, who was committed to keeping Eleanor's children in the program. The owner helped organize a letter writing campaign to GAIN from the other parents in the program to protest GAIN's guidelines.

Eleanor: *She wanted me, her staff and parents from the school to write a letter to GAIN, telling them that they need program guidelines. I thought that they misled me. They want you to get a job. But then they say, 'Snatch your childcare.' It's a stepping stone. Who's to say that next year I might not have a better job? Right now, I'm at the bottom. I'm going to stick with the company because there are a lot of advantages. They can send me to engineering school. I can work in maintenance, engineering or as a painter. They will pay for me to go to school.*

Eleanor was grateful for the child care arrangement her advocate facilitated.

Eleanor: *My daughter and son know Spanish. It's a good school, so it's worth it. These children run around and go to different workshops, science room, drama room. Each room they can do what they want. The owner said, 'I don't want to disrupt your children. We have grown to love them.' They are there eight hours a day. I asked, 'Well, can we just cut the hours?' She said, 'No, I want them here at 9 a.m.' Since the school is saying she can go with that half payment, we're going to work something out. I don't want them to leave. It's hard to find somebody. Some schools want all their money. This school has about sixty children. Mostly they have mothers and fathers, but some single parents. But many have good jobs. It's around $680 for Jonathan, $600 for Brenda and $300 for Jennae a month. It goes through second grade.*

Eleanor was off drugs, was back to work and had her children in day care. But there were still daunting obstacles in her path. Once she started working, for example, Eleanor found her AFDC check suddenly reduced. As Suzette recalls, Eleanor was confused and upset by the sudden change.

Suzette: *At one point they cut off her food stamps, and she did not know why. She was supposed to turn in her CH7 every time with her paycheck stub. Apparently they were missing one stub. She was frantic, so I went to visit her and tried to calm her. We had to think about what we were going to do. First we called her eligibility worker. There was a message machine, so we went down there to see if we could speak to somebody else. I spoke to the supervisor who was unable to help, and then I spoke to his supervisor. He said they didn't have any emergency food stamps, that they just have to go through the process of getting them at the time. Eleanor was crying and frantic. I knew there were resources out there so I was trying to trying to get her something until she was able to get her food stamps straightened out. I called the talk line. Luckily, I knew someone there who was able to give her a $25 food voucher. I took her to the grocery store and got her*

food until she could get her food stamps or her check. A lot was happening-- her PG&E was also cut off too. It seemed like it was one crisis after another.

Suzette helped Eleanor stay focused on problem-solving by working with her on a monthly budget.

Suzette: *We sat down and did a budget because she was paying what she could to Catherine Michaels from the money that was owed. Her AFDC and food stamp check were being cut. The amount she was receiving didn't really fit with what she was making. So I made another connection with a person who knew about DHF and eligibility. She was a supervisor and knew most of the workers there and she talked with Eleanor. She looked in the computer to see about her eligibility for AFDC, the amount that she was to get and her food stamps. They gave her a breakdown of why money was taken out and what exactly she was going to be getting each month. That way we were able to work out a budget and see how she could keep the bills maintained. It was a tough transition. So much support seemed to have moved away, and she had to figure out how to organize, budget and cope. But getting the childcare taken care of helped out a lot.*

Suzette found it was important to keep Eleanor focused on positive, constructive steps. She wanted Eleanor to keep in mind how far she had come, and what goals she still wanted to attain.

Suzette: Eleanor was *feeling down, feeling that nothing was working. But she had made a lot of progress and was holding up well compared to the past when she didn't have her children and she was going through the transition of leaving her mom and avoiding drugs. She was pretty motivated, but she was just feeling like she was being pushed further and further down.*

Suzette also wanted to help Eleanor learn more about the system and what services were available to her. She wanted to facilitate a process by which Eleanor would learn how to advocate for herself.

Suzette: *She needed to know what services were out there. I tried to connect her with services. I had to make sure she knew what was there for her and that she knew how to advocate for herself. We did a lot of things together; making calls, telling her what services were out there, having her do things for herself. I gave her the referrals and resources; sometimes I would go with her and other times just have her do it herself.*

Suzette's role became that of both case manager AND counselor. She had to make sure that Eleanor not only got the information but that she interpreted the information accurately. The more Eleanor gained a grasp of her situation, the more her anxieties were eased.

Suzette: *A lot of her anxieties came from not knowing what was going to happen. I talked to her about knowing how to deal with certain situations when they came up. Things*

would happen and she would feel out of control. I could see it in the way she would relate with her children as well. She would get really tense and scream and I'd have to have her take a look at what was happening and how it was affecting her relationship with her children. I could see that at times, she would get tense and she'd separate herself from the situation or try to calm herself down. We worked on looking at the positive side, at seeing what she wanted to do and what things she had already accomplished. She was very motivated, but felt like a weight was being put on her shoulders and everything was falling apart. So we tried to keep her focused on the things that she had accomplished already.

Family Advocates must be vigilantly attuned to the relationship between parent/guardian and children. In addition to identifying and making referrals to agencies that provide developmental services to the birth to age 3 population, the Family Advocate must understand child development and communicate its importance to families. This task is complicated by some of the cultural beliefs that parents bring with them about child rearing practices. The Family Advocate must work hard to understand parents' cultural beliefs, all the while planting kernels of thoughts and ideas of different ways to look at a child's behavior.

For example, African-American families commonly believe that, in order for children to survive in society, they must be "toughened up" and made strong because life will be hard for them. Family Advocates have observed parents who placed their children in walkers by five and six months of age because they thought it would help them learn to walk at an earlier than average age. Such beliefs are, in part, the result of parents' ignorance about what is developmentally appropriate at different ages, and not understanding the sequence of development, but in large part, it is simply the parents repeating the way they were raised with their own children. Unfortunately, the difficulty of surviving in Marin City and the community's culture of violence reinforces parents' unrealistic expectation that their children need to be "tough" to survive.

The Family Advocate must work to help the parents understand that when a parent is responsive and supportive, infants and young children begin to feel secure, and that in their self-security, they will begin to feel competent in exploring the world around them. They helped parents learn that the child needs to feel that the world is a safe place to explore.

Furthermore, the Family Advocates provide parents with opportunities to explore their own feelings, and in doing so, establish a model for parents to become more empathetic with their own children. By helping parents become more attuned to their children's emotional and temperamental needs, Family Advocates ultimately help children achieve greater security within their families.

Suzette's knowledge of San Francisco's Social Service system also proved invaluable as she tried to advocate for Eleanor.

Suzette: *I knew some of the people personally, having worked with them previously. I just knew where to look, which helped a lot. If Eleanor was having problems, she needed to know where she could turn for help. With the children, it's sometimes hard for her to get around. It's important to set families up. It's good to set families up with something so that they can feel like they have resources. I remember when Eleanor talked about getting to know the community and what that was like, being a single parent with no car to get around, not to mention being new to San Francisco. There were a couple of older men who, when they saw Eleanor's children waiting for the bus every morning, they would ring the doorbell when the bus came. She was getting to know some people, which was really good. That's one thing that I was trying to stress with Eleanor, to not be isolated. She was going through a lot. And just being in a new city can be overwhelming.*

By the time Suzette finished working with her, Eleanor was well on her way toward a more rewarding professional and personal life.

Suzette: *One very good thing was that she had a lot of support through her job. At times her child would get sick and she had to take some time off. Or if she had a crisis with AFDC, they would allow her to deal with it, which was great. Before I left, she also went to an interview for another job within the same organization, at a higher level, working on the grounds. She was excited. She went to the interview and she got the job. It's a job with a lot of potential and a higher pay rate. She seemed pretty satisfied with that. That's where she was before I left. She seemed pretty motivated. She was planning on moving out of the place she was in. I think she was going to try to get move into one of the housing complexes nearby.*

In making her dramatic transition, Eleanor was learning crucial life skills. But there was still room for a Family Advocate to play an important role. At one point, when Eleanor had a problem with her landlord, Suzette helped resolve the problem by getting a detailed picture of both sides of the story.

Suzette: *It was the screen on the window. She was in a different apartment and she ended up moving to another apartment because they wouldn't put a screen on the window. Once she moved into the other apartment, the rent was a little higher and she didn't understand why. So she talked with the landlord about the rental agreement.*

A lot of what Eleanor and I talked about was just getting information. Her PG&E bill was late one time. So I made a point of telling her to call the electric company and tell them what was happening. People will work with you if you communicate with them. I told her to talk to the landlord and let him know what was happening because she was unable to pay all the rent. I said to tell him that she'll pay part this month and the rest of it later. Let him know what's going on. It was a matter of informing her that things can be worked out. That helped a lot.

She likes her new job. One thing she complained about at the other job was she that she was inside with no ventilation. Now she's out on the grounds and she has her own phone. She is really happy with it. And there's a lot of potential for more training. One of her little girls is graduating this month. There are a lot of good things happening.

The Importance of Support

During her experience with MCFF, Eleanor worked with four Family Advocates, and she showed a remarkable ability to work well with each of them. She also made an important decision: not to return to Marin City. She felt it was vital to stand on her own two feet, no matter how tempting it was to return to her childhood home. Eleanor's Family Advocates helped facilitate this process as Eleanor worked to make a clean break.

Suzette: *She talked a lot about going back to Marin City, and even considered going. But that was only a brief moment. She realized she did not want to do that. And so we worked together to figure out what she wanted to do. She liked Catherine Michaels' school because the children were doing well there, the teachers were well-trained and seemed comfortable doing their jobs. They talked to her about everything that was going on with the children. Plus, her youngest daughter was very shy and she was watching her become more open. We talked about her options. Since GAIN was no longer paying for the childcare, she would have to be responsible for the payments. I supported her in finding a solution, and Catherine Michaels was really supportive. I made several calls to GAIN, talked to the worker there, tried to help Eleanor understand the transition from GAIN to work, and how that fit into paying for childcare. Eleanor just didn't have the full picture.*

Eleanor was pleased by the support and encouragement her Family Advocates provided. She was also grateful to have learned how to solve problems on her own.

Eleanor: *They gave me a lot of support. They made sure that my children and I were all right, to see if we needed anything. I've been surviving. I don't call my mother for anything anymore. It's been positive for me to be on my own and grow up. They made me feel like somebody was still there to help me after Jelani House -- to get me adjusted to living out here. I'd be screaming and hollering, 'You children are driving me crazy.' And they'd say, 'Well what are you doing?' 'Well, I'm yelling back at them.' She [the Family Advocate] would say, 'Don't yell at them. Sometimes you've got to walk away from your children.' They really helped me with maintaining my composure with the children. Jonathan, my son, has asthma, and they helped me with that. He had to go to the hospital three times. He had asthma at three months.*

Sally, I love Sally. She really helped me. Sally got involved with me around Christmas. She made it here every week. I miss her; she is very sweet. She was always there to listen to me; she knew about my relationship and how I felt about not working. She was an open ear for me. She never judged me, never said that I needed to get off my butt. She said I really needed to find what I wanted to do with my life.

Working has been a confidence-booster for Eleanor. She no longer feels isolated or fearful. For the first time in years, she has visions for her future and realizes that this job is a small step on the road to self-sufficiency. She has learned to enjoy all the moments that she has with her children and realizes that even though being a single parent can be tough, all their time together as a family is important.

Eleanor: *I pick my children up from school and when they see me, they come running. They can tell that I have missed them. We go home and fix dinner. I give them their baths, we do homework together and then the day is over. The children know that dinner time, bath time and morning time belongs to us. That's our time. So I'm feeling better because I'm not lashing out at them any more.*

Eleanor plans to start school this winter and save enough money so she can buy a car to go on weekend outings with her children.

Freda: The Value of Family

Freda is a married, 26-year-old woman, who is the mother of three children and one step-son. She has been married for seven and a half years. Battling addiction and trying to rebuild her relationship with her husband, Freda has relied on MCFF to help put back together the essential pieces of her life and resolve issues of guilt and regret.

She has worked with two successive family advocates. Her transition between the pair highlights the delicate nature and ultimate rewards that come when meaningful relationships develop between families and their advocates.

Freda: program participant
Georgia: sister of Freda
John: step-father of Freda
Leslie: county social worker
Damon: husband of Freda
DeAndre: son of Freda and Damon
Janet: daughter of Freda and Damon
Jenice: daughter of Freda and Damon
Tyrone: step-son of Freda
Arlene: family advocate
Rebecca: family advocate

Childhood

The importance of family for Freda, but also its potential pitfalls, go back to her childhood, and continue to this day. Born in Kansas, Freda and her twin sister, Georgia, were toddlers when their parents divorced. Their mother and the three children moved to Marin City where, for a time, they lived with their maternal grandmother. Freda remembers being about 4 or 5 when her mother remarried John, her step-father.

Freda*: There were four of us. From age 5 or 6 until about 11, we stayed with my Grandma. It was back and forth between her house and my mom's house. The boys stayed with Mom. They didn't like Grandma's house; they got scolded all the time and then she died when we were about 11. We moved back to Mom's house. I remember the whole time being at Mom's house. She worked a lot. She was almost never there. Then there was our step-dad, who was there most of the time. We didn't like him. We weren't allowed to cook on the stove. There was nothing to eat there, no bologna, bread, nothing, just cereal. We told Mom all the time. She'd chew him out. It was bad because he was working in construction and he injured himself and broke his toe. One toe and he's never been to work since. Never ever, ever, not even to this day, has this man worked. I remember one Christmas Day, he wouldn't let us open our Christmas presents in the morning. We were sitting in the window and I can remember watching all the*

children outside. He didn't want to pick up the wrapping paper off the floor. That was the reason.

When the twins, Freda and Georgia, were 12 years old., their mother sent them to live with a paternal aunt in Kansas City. It was during that time that her mother divorced John, their step-father. During times of financial stress, Freda's mother relied on her family to help her with the children. Freda remembers many cycles of being in Marin City, leaving and then returning. This scenario happened several times in junior high school and again in high school. Freda remembers that she was more outspoken than her twin sister, which caused problems with her aunt, who believed children should know their place.

Freda: *Georgia and I went to Kansas City to stay with our aunt. Mom called us and told us that she and John were through. She sounded sad. The first time we went out there- that school was really cool. My aunt was a school teacher and she owned a daycare. Her husband was really well off. Then a year later, we came back home to Marin City. Georgia was always a grade ahead of me since the second grade. When we came back to King Junior High, Mom put us both in the seventh grade, so that was neat; I finally caught up. It was more an embarrassment than anything.*

It must have been the ninth grade that we went back to Kansas City Central High School. This was one of those high schools you see on the news with chains on the doors and gates with the stick things at the top. It was like a prison. You couldn't leave campus. Guards in the hallways. It was so different than what we were used to. Here we were, California girls; sandals, the stretch pants, the whole nine yards. They called us surfers. It was a trip. I remember a lot of the children said we talked like white people. My mom said, 'You tell them you speak proper English.' It turned out to be quite a year for me anyway. It was really cool. After I got over the New Kid from California stuff, we started making friends, so it worked out. We saw our Dad, but he really let us down a lot. He would say he'd come for the weekends and he would never show up. Then he would try to make it up big time with video games, movies, dinners out.

I'll never forget when we made the honor roll for the first time ever in our life. Aunt Kathy was mad because I didn't want to be there with her because she was just too controlling. We were used to being able to make decisions about our hair and our clothes. As long we were not completely crazy, we have choices, and that's how we were pretty much raised with Mom. Kathy's attitude was, 'Do what I say and how I say to do it and you better do it right.' A couple of days later I called Mom and said, 'I can't deal with this.' So Mom sent me a ticket home and Georgia stayed. It was devastating to me that she didn't want to come with me. I wasn't going to stay there but it was really hard to leave her. When I came home, I went to Redwood. It seemed forever before Georgia actually made it back to California.

Hanging Out, Getting High

When Freda returned home from Kansas, she was lost without her sister. She started hanging out with a rough crowd. They were children from Marin City, but they had a negative influence on her life. Her life quickly careened out of control. Neither her sister nor her mother knew just how out of control Freda had become in a few short months.

Freda: *Georgia and I both ended up at Redwood. I was caught up in a crazy crowd during those last two months of school, and we would go out drinking and smoking weed and things like that. These were children we grew up with. So being gone, then coming back was a reason to celebrate. We'd go out and have a beer and drink wine coolers. We couldn't get along with the girls out here. So we had guy friends and we climbed the trees and did the hikes in the woods and stuff like that. Played football and whatever else.*

One time a brother put crack in the weed and I didn't know; I just thought I was smoking weed and it was different. I thought, well, 'What kind of weed is this?' So that's when I started smoking crack. It got way out of control really fast. I'd say by the time Georgia came back home, I was cutting school, staying out half the night and sneaking back in before Mom was up in the morning. Just doing crazy stuff like that.

Georgia didn't comprehend that we were getting out of hand. She was a people person. She had to make sure Mom was happy when she was here. When we were with Aunt Kathy, she had to make sure Kathy was fine. She was this perfect person and then, of course, I was the jerk. For a long time, she didn't understand what I was doing. She didn't hang out with the group of people that I hung out with. She was taking care of our little sister.

I'd say that Mom was an alcoholic. Mom would disagree with that, but she was always out drinking. Georgia and I would get up in the morning and get ourselves to school, come home and pick up our little sister, make sure there was dinner. Georgia turned into our mom when she came back from Kansas City. We were complete opposites at that point. I thought life was OK and what's the big deal? Nobody ever goes to school, weed is the thing to do and crack here and there. What's wrong with a wine cooler? And then I thought, Mom is blasted all the time, what's the big deal with me having a wine cooler; she's drinking gin.

Mom was pretty strict with us. Although I don't remember my mom ever whooping us, she had rules. It was almost like a partnership. If something was disagreeable, we would talk about it. She was half drunk all the time, so she was not capable of supervising us. I think that is part of the reason why I took off in the wrong direction. Finally, she realized (after I ran away for a week with a friend who was carrying some money) how out of control I'd become. My friend and I blew $50,000 in a week on crack, a car, hotels, shopping. Totally blew this money. That's when Mom saw something was going on and started to pay attention to my behavior. She brought me to Marin City Family Services

and I talked to Billy, a drug counselor: "This is what you're doing and you can't do this and this is what you should be doing. I thought, how dare this man tell me what I needed to be doing. I was not even 16 yet. This was my first taste of trying to recover, I guess. But at that point, I didn't think I had a problem; I thought everyone else had a problem.

My First Relationship: Love at First Sight

Freda: *Once I was drunk and I was walking through the parking lot to the house and there was this guy leaning up against the wall. I thought, why are you leaning in my mother's carport? Then he turned around and I instantly fell in love. He had these gorgeous brown eyes, beautiful complexion and skin. That would be my husband today; that's how I met Damon. He was at my house visiting. He came in with Georgia's boyfriend. So I was just standing there looking all gooey-eyed at him. We were talking, and I didn't want him to know what I did, so I stopped. Can you believe that? I just stopped doing drugs. He was doing the same thing I was, only he was smoking crack cocaine a little bit and he didn't want me to know, so he stopped. Here's this secret we had that we never knew about one another. It seems like I must have just turned 16. I remember our first date; it was June 7th. We went to the fair down here. He bought me this big raisin thing and I kept it until last year when the legs finally fell off it. It was a really cool relationship. I was back in school; by this time I was at San Andreas Alternative High School as I was so far behind in credits. I went to summer school that summer. It was a complete turnaround. Mom was so amazed and so thrilled that I had done this.*

Two months after I met him, I found out I was pregnant. We told Mom. At first, she had a shocked look on her face. Then she talked about the options; get married or get an abortion or if you don't get married, keep the kid. This is what you have to look forward to, this is my experience. We were so excited, we went and told his mom. She said, 'You are going to marry this one.' Apparently, he had gotten a few girls pregnant. I guess most of them got abortions and one that was going to keep the baby had a miscarriage. His mom almost demanded marriage. So now he felt obligated to marry me, but he wasn't ready for marriage. So the next thing I know, I'm standing at an altar getting married. He was 20. My dad came out. There were presents and cake and I was all caught up in the wedding. I wasn't thinking that this is a commitment for the rest of my life; I don't think he was thinking that. We were all caught up in the confusion and drama of the marriage. He did not know how to tell me that he didn't want to marry me and he was crying because he didn't want to get married. But it was too late because he was there and people had flown out from different parts of the US and he couldn't just turn around in the church and walk away. I thought he was crying because he was so happy. So, here I am in this girdle my mom put on me because I was pregnant. It was a nice wedding, I guess.

I met him in June and married him in December. So we lived between his and my mom's house for the next couple months. Then we finally got an apartment. Seems like he started getting high when he got paid. We only got high every two weeks, so I figured it

was no problem. Luckily, Janet was not toxic at birth; she was a healthy kid. So after I had her, we started getting high more frequently, like every weekend. Then he lost his job and I went on welfare. We just went consistently downhill from there. By June, we were completely strung out on drugs. We would send Janet off to stay with Georgia. Janet was never with us. Georgia basically raised my kid.

We were just drugged out. Arguing, fighting; he used to beat on me all the time. I had sworn that no man was ever going to put his hands on me again after my step-dad beat me and here I was in this relationship getting beat up just about every day. I finally said this is not going to happen to me, so I started calling the police on him. They'd let him out a few hours later. It just escalated and got worse and worse, but I would call the police every time. This was before the domestic laws were really in place. The last time he beat me up, he kept me in the house for two days; he wouldn't let me out. He knew I'd go straight out and call the police. It was the hardest thing I had done because we had made up and everything was fine. I promised myself that every time he hit me, I was calling the police. This time, they took him and kept him. I cried when the police picked him up; I didn't want them to take him, but I promised myself to do this. He'd break the glass, windows, kick down doors. He would destroy everything around. But he never put his hands on me again.

Getting Clean and Sober: Who will Care for the Children?

Damon was arrested and forced into a rehabilitation program. Freda was 18 and pregnant with her second child. She was alone trying to survive the best way she knew how.

Freda: *Our marriage was hell. I didn't even know why we were still together. I didn't know him. He was arrested a few times for drug possession. Finally, he was forced to get clean. The last time I called the police, they kept him a long time and told him he had to go to a program or go to prison. So he enrolled in one. He got clean and stayed clean. I was using even more then, because he was gone. This was the next couple of years.*

I remember the birth of my son. I was in labor trying to finish my crack because I knew if I went to the hospital, I couldn't hide it in my house; someone would steal it. I knew I was in labor, but I couldn't leave my crack. I didn't have a phone but Georgia lived behind me. I was trying to get to her house and I was about halfway there and the pain would stop, so I'd run back to the house. I did this for quite a few hours. Finally my water broke and I had to yell over the balcony, 'Help! I'm in labor.' She called the ambulance. I wouldn't let the paramedic in because I had three roaches left. It was sick and sad.

God must have been watching over me because I wasn't. DeAndre is like a miracle child; he should be completely messed up. They had to do an emergency C-section. CPS got involved; they wouldn't let me take him home. Now I can really say thanks to Leslie Johnson, the county social worker. She took the children from me, which was the best thing for them; I was being very neglectful. Janet was potty trained, don't ask me how.

All I know is, one day I ran out of diapers and I never bought anymore. The house was always a mess; I never cleaned. I'm surprised they didn't starve to death. That's why I can thank Georgia. She practically raised them. They were taken in 1992.

I did not go into a program until 1994. It seemed so much longer than that, probably because I hadn't taken care of them all that time. I blamed Damon for a long time. I blamed CPS. I blamed my Aunt Kathy. My Great-Grandma died. It was always someone else's fault. I got evicted from my apartment. I was homeless. I had stopped eating. I weighed 80 pounds. I looked like death warmed over. Meanwhile, Damon is getting clean and sober and doing this program. Part of his program was not to have contact with old people, places and things, and I guess I was old people to him, because I was still out there. I would have been jeopardizing his sobriety. He told me that it was strongly suggested that he get a divorce and forget about our marriage, but something in him could not do that. The children were with his mom. So when he got out of the program, he was doing really well. He had a car, he was working. He was taking care of our children, combing their hair in the morning. It made me feel better that he was there.

Who Will Help Me?

Freda: *I was pregnant again and in denial. I pretended like my stomach wasn't even there. Damon told me, 'You get yourself cleaned up or you will never see me or these children again. You have only two choices; you can stay out here and continue to get high or get yourself in a program.' I went to Marin Services for Women. I had to have that last pint of vodka because I was going in. So they sent me to detox. I tried again a week later. This time, I tried to sneak my drugs in. That didn't work. I got kicked out. Finally, I went back again. I was really pregnant at this point. This was in April; Jenice was born in May. I went to this doctor who said, 'You can't do any chores - bedrest.' At the program, they said, 'No, sorry; you go home and when you're off of bed rest you can come back. You've got to do your chores and your meditation and come down for dinner.' So, I left again, and went on one last run. My sobriety date is May 17th.*

When my daughter was finally born on May 9th, I wasn't in the program. CPS took her because I admitted to using. I went back to Mom's house. May 16th was my last drug run and Arlene, my Family Advocate, came to pick me up on the 17th and brought me over there. They brought the baby back a week later and I started doing this program. At first, I cried every night. I was there because I needed Damon back, because I wanted my children back, because Mom was really happy I was there. I was there for every reason but myself. It took me about a month to get it: OK, Freda, you're in here because you deserve better. When I was young, I was going to be somebody. Nothing was going to stop Freda from being successful in life. We weren't raised on welfare growing up. I was not going to be on welfare. When I was in the ninth grade, I wanted to be a dental assistant and I got all the information to do that. That was what I was going to be but it just got clouded and fogged after that point. All that stuff came back to me and all of a sudden, I knew my purpose again and I started feeling better about myself.

Arlene, the MCFF Family Advocate assigned to the case, had been involved with DeAndre since he had been placed in the paternal grandmother's home. She had worked with Damon and understood his sorrow at seeing the mother of his children looking half dead, walking the streets of Marin City. He needed a way to reach her, but he was scared that he would jeopardize his own sobriety trying to help her and then where would the children be?

Freda: *I was really grateful that Arlene was there to support me. She gave me goals to work on. She did a lot of talking with me and Damon together about our relationship. We wanted to continue with it. Janet and DeAndre were with him still and Jenice was with me in the program. I got really close to Arlene, and after twelve months in the program, I got out. Our Section 8 voucher for housing came through and we moved to Novato and I thought things were going pretty well. Our marriage was OK. I still didn't know him and he didn't know me. I think we were together more for the children at that point.*

Arlene was my best friend. Anytime anything went wrong, I couldn't think of anyone else to talk to. When she told me she was leaving, I thought, 'Hello, get all in somebody's life and then leave -- you can't do that.' Then was thinking about all the losses I'd gone through. My grandma, that was a big one; Georgia, that was a huge one; and Damon, the children, everybody that I'd ever cared for, left me. I felt I was pretty strong in my sobriety. There was nothing at that point in my life that could get me back there. I would think about what it was like out on the streets and what it's like now. That's where I'm at in my recovery and that's where I was early on in my sobriety because once I got it, there was no turning back.

The process of transferring Freda's case from Arlene to Sara was not easy. Freda was having a difficult time letting go of Arlene, who was moving out of the county, and accepting Sara as her new Family Advocate. Sara was never good enough in Freda's mind. Sara recalls the challenge of making the transition.

Sara: *It was extremely difficult. Freda presented herself as a very intelligent, articulate young woman. So I came in with the presumption that, being articulate, she would be able to do the transfer easily. I think she uses the advocates really well. That is, she really uses them for the relationship. She got a lot out of it and I think she got really close to Arlene. There was a wonderful therapeutic relationship there and it was really difficult for her to let that go and accept a new person. I think she was also grieving her grandmother who was a big part of her life. I think the loss just re-stimulated those old feelings that she had of being abandoned.*

It was really good to have Arlene close by, to consult with on this case. Arlene had not left at that point--she was moving to a different role within the program. So Arlene was able to do some mediating between Freda and me. Freda was avoiding me and I think she did not want to talk about certain issues with me. Those were the very issues that I

thought were important. The main thing I was looking at was her recovery. She was still pretty new at it, and she was very much still in the throes of the transition to a clean and sober life. She was just starting to pull out of the lifestyle and establish a different kind of lifestyle; a lifestyle that had nothing to do with drugs and drug-induced behavior. That was the most difficult part because I began confronting her on some of the things that she was doing. I think it was my second or third meeting with her. I know I did it in a pretty caring way because I myself have experienced that so I kept trying to think about the gentlest way to do it. But it was too scary and she was feeling the loss. I think if she and I could have focused on dealing with the loss instead of what was going on with her at the moment, it would have really helped.

As overseer of the program's caseload, the PD must monitor transfers and new clients and see that solid relationships grow between program participants and their Family Advocates. This is part of a broader effort on the part of the PD to work with Family Advocates as they work directly with the clients. The PD typically meets with each Family Advocate individually once a week for at least an hour. The purposes of these meetings are to help the Family Advocates to understand the families' needs; to develop specific intervention strategies to use with families; to acknowledge the impact advocates are having on the families; and to provide a theoretical framework within which they can assess their work.

A problem-solving approach is used to assess each family's difficulties or concerns and to guide the Family Advocate in developing and implementing family plans. This approach helps Family Advocates prioritize the family's problems and develop a plan for working on the immediate problems, while also helping the family become more self-sufficient.

The meetings between the PD and Family Advocate are structured like a peer consultation, allowing the advocate to become an active participant in the decision-making. Support and encouragement are key to this process; the goal is to establish positive relationships with the Family Advocate by using a model that depicts the role of supervisor as consultant, rather than one of authority.

The seriousness of problems experienced by MCFF families, and thus the problems that Family Advocates help them to resolve, has resulted in a crisis orientation among MCFF Family Advocates. The PD's clinical skills are thus a great support in helping them to find ways to help families solve their immediate problems, while seeing beyond the isolated family to the larger picture: a comprehensive, coordinated child and family service system.

Given that much of the Family Advocate's work with the families involves crisis intervention, the PD is available for the advocates to consult by phone and on an ad hoc basis.

With Arlene's help, Freda gradually grew accustomed to the change in Family Advocates.

Freda: *Arlene said, 'There is this really nice lady named Sara and I want you to meet her.' I said I don't want to meet anyone. Then when I met Sara, I didn't like her. I avoided her like the plague and I did that for a couple of months. I was trying to figure out what it was about Sara I didn't like. I was still in contact with Arlene; she gave me her number. I think it was the first couple of times that we met, everything had to do with what happened to me before and she'd ask, "Well how does that make you feel? What does that remind you of?" I felt like she was grilling me. Everything had to do with my recovery, with the fact that I was using. She was getting on my nerves.*

Finally, Arlene said, 'You need to sit down and talk to her or call her on the phone, or write her a letter and tell her how you feel about her.' The moment I was able to do that, the relationship went forward. Then I couldn't get enough of Sara. I didn't forget about Arlene, but it was like the grieving was over because here was somebody new. We clicked after I was able to tell her that I felt she was smothering me -- that I didn't feel like everything that happened in my life always had to do with my drug use. Stuff happens and I might just be having a bad day. People who don't use have messed up days too. One major thing she helped me through was to get to couple's counseling.

Clients typically have histories of working with professionals representing a variety of social service, legal and enforcement agencies; many of their experiences have been negative ones that cause clients to bring fear and mistrust to subsequent relationships with individuals who profess to try to help them. Consequently, Family Advocates who begin relationships with clients thoughtfully and slowly, who withhold judgment, and who do not promise to "fix" either the person or their situation, have increased likelihood of acceptance. Frequently, it may take six months to a year to establish trust; to prove that they can tolerate rejection; and to demonstrate they can listen, be non-judgmental and help when needed.

Often, establishing solid connections with clients is the function of persistent, if not tenacious, wooing of clients who, on various levels, spurn assistance and force the Family Advocates to "prove" themselves. Because many of the MCFF clients have long histories of involvement with social service agencies, they often are very suspicious of any help that is offered. Family Advocates attempting to establish a relationship with a new client often encounter weeks of missed and canceled appointments because the client does not understand the Family Advocate's objectives. The potential new client is often testing the Family Advocate not only to see if she will continue to pursue the family after the family rejects their efforts, but to see how quickly the Family Advocate is able to render services and demonstrate usefulness to the client. Although it is a labor intensive effort on the part of the Family Advocate, the formation of the working alliance is the foundation for progress.

Couples Work: Is There A Way To Save Our Relationship?

Sara recognized right away that Freda was grappling with deep-rooted relationship issues - issues that were hindering her interactions with her children and her husband.

Sara: *Freda had a lot of feelings about her addiction and how it related to the children. When I first met them, she and her husband were having a lot of problems. She was having an affair and he was having an affair and they were both in denial about it, not wanting to talk to each other about it. Freda would tell me about her affair and I would try to process it with her -- what did this mean in her marriage and where could it go? Together we questioned how important the marriage was to her and did she really want the marriage to be intact? She wanted the marriage to last, but certain issues were revisiting her that she wasn't able to leave behind. I tried to keep her focused on what she was doing today. I think having me there and having me help her hold onto the lifestyle that she really wanted, the dream that she had in her mind about having a family, being healthy, loving each other was really helpful. But she didn't know how to get to it.*

Helping Freda realize that her goals and dreams were attainable meant helping her develop a new sense of herself.

Sara: *All the work I did with her was related to her new vision of self. In the process of doing that work, we were able to process all the feelings that came up for her about her drug use. There was a lot of guilt and a lot of sadness. There were times when she would just cry about the situations that she went through. She did a lot of internal work and that made my job exciting. I knew that when I left her home that she would be able to go back and use our sessions to process whatever came up. Freda moved very slowly out of that old lifestyle. So it felt like the work we did together was meaningful and helpful.*

Individual and family counseling are ongoing tools used by the Family Advocate. Home-based mental health interventions focusing on individuals, parent-child relationships and family dynamics is a complex task for even the most highly trained clinician. The Family Advocates' task is complicated by the more immediate, overwhelming issues each family must contend with in order to survive in their communities, including substance abuse, domestic violence and unemployment.

Although it is often difficult to do more than deal with a family's crises, Family Advocates must help clients re-frame their experience through understanding the root causes of their difficulties if they are to make long-term progress.

By assessing the situation, prioritizing goals and developing case plans, the Family Advocate and client decide how they will address these issues. Once immediate issues are under control, the client is more receptive to working on deeper, psychological problems that are identified. As with providing family support, the strong working alliance is integral to psychological work with families. It is

impossible for families to divulge their innermost demons if they do not feel they can trust the provider or if they feel they will be met by judgmental attitudes and criticism.

In many ways, the Family Advocate must be the receptacle of the individual, parent/child and family emotions. The Family Advocate must have the ability to contain their own feelings and impulses to help families through each situation. They help the client re-frame their experience by understanding the root cause of the difficulty. This requires careful listening, observation and thoughtful reflection of the underlying meaning of family issues and dynamics. When presented with the opportunity, the Family Advocate's task is to connect the past to the present in order to help parents understand themselves in light of their current struggles.

Even before she began working on a new vision of herself, Freda could feel her relationship with Damon falling apart. She didn't want that. But she couldn't stop their relationship from disintegrating.

Freda: *At some point, Damon and I were arguing back and forth. We were talking divorce court. I was having affairs, he was having an affair and we were through with each other. I moved with the children. Once I got clean and sober, the children were mine; if he moved, he wasn't taking the children. Everything was bad. So here we were, clean and sober, and still we didn't know each other. Who were we to each other? What did we want from each other? We were like two strangers. So we were talking divorce.*

But that just didn't seem like the right thing for us to do. Sara got us into couple's counseling. She actually got us to take that first step in the door. It wasn't even marriage counseling at first; it was counseling for me. Trying to love this man I didn't know; trying to make this work for the children; determined to stick in there. I wanted to prove to my family I could do something and keep it going. There were whispers in the family. I just didn't want to end it like that. I started going to counseling just by myself. I was able to say to Damon, 'Look, we do marriage counseling or quit. This is my life and I've got to make a decision that I can live with.' After we did that, Sara helped me get the couple's counseling going.

I am so in love with Damon now. I feel like I know who he is. There are more things I can learn about him. We have only been in counseling one and a half years. We communicate, express our feelings, share things. We are completely in love with each other. It's really cool. Our eighth wedding anniversary is coming up and when we were using, I didn't think it was going to last. I'm sure we completely shocked everybody else who was involved on the outside looking in, that this actually worked.

Marin City Families First: A Gift of Support

Freda: *My stepson, Tyrone, is twelve. He has lived with us for the past three years. He came to visit October 4, 1993 and his mother had not put him in school yet that year. We*

kept him and he has been with us ever since. He goes to visit his mom but she acts like she couldn't give a damn. I know she drinks quite a bit.

You can't point the finger at her; the brown paper bag in the back pocket. Tyrone has a lot of feelings because he wants so bad for his mother to be a part of his life. She's just not there. He's like my own. When you ask me how many children I have, I have four. He was going through this episode earlier this summer, right at the end of school, where he was trying to kill himself. And I was at a loss what to do. He had just turned twelve. He has this longing for his mama and she is just not there. We are doing the best that we can. I don't know if it's right that we are doing this. We are trying to keep him occupied with other things; basketball and taking him places like the movies.

Sara has helped me. The teacher called to say that he was trying to kill himself at school. I called Sara and she immediately started calling around to find somewhere we could get help. I told her we were with Kaiser. 'Oh, take him to Kaiser; they will see him.' We started doing that and it's worked out well. He was arguing with himself back and forth, describing it as a devil on his one shoulder and an angel on the other. Arguing back and forth if he should kill himself or not. It was a struggle. I won't say it's under control, just a lot better. Once Kaiser ran out of the allotted visits, I haven't found him another counselor. I know I can call Sara and she can talk with him.

I was having problems when I started back to school. I called Sara and she was there for me. My teacher was criticizing me for wearing my hair in braids, so Sara helped me talk to the teacher. I was wearing my hair like this because I don't like to comb my hair. It has nothing to do with my being black. If these people don't want me up there because of my braids, to hell with them.

Then there was something that happened with Jenice's school; I can't remember. DeAndre and Janet came home and told me his teacher was going to whoop him at school. I wanted to believe my children, but I consulted with Sara. I got her opinion about the situation. Together we went to the school and we talked about it with the teacher. On occasion, I may spank the children but I usually don't because of the way I grew up; it's not OK to hit somebody. They know it's not OK. I tell them, 'Nobody has the right to put their hands on you; I don't care what you did.' We got it under control and I explained to them that moving them was not hitting or whooping or even punishment. It's OK if your teacher tells you to sit down when you are not being a good listener. It's OK for them to help you sit down. I haven't heard anymore about that.

Sara is there all the time. I thought I was pregnant last week. I called her at home at 10:30 at night. She told me, 'Don't think about it and go Monday and take a test and wait for the results.' My period came Monday. It's about us as a unit, a family. Damon is not really involved in other things. But this program actually means something to him. Damon doesn't let people in but he has actually let Sara in. Sara would come up to the house and meet with me and if Damon was there, he'd sit right in on the conversation. That says a lot about this program and Sara. There are only two people since our

relationship got better; Sara and our marriage counselor. That is it. In our whole eight years. He doesn't even let his mom in that much. He always acts like he is a strong rock and nothing's wrong with him ever.

Freda reflected on her worries of loosing her Family Advocate. She tried to think about what her life would be like without Sara.

Freda: *If Sara leaves, I'm going to be completely upset. I've been through two people since I've been involved with the program. I don't think that I would be able to function - well I don't know, there wouldn't be that support. I probably feel like a baby bird being kicked out of the nest. I think that I would find ways to deal with my problems. Sara is there to support me, but she also makes me look at my life realistically. I look at my part and try not to make it all their fault, so Sara is there to say, 'OK what is your part? Let's not say what Damon has done, but what have you done or how can you change the situation around?' It would be difficult, not completely difficult, but it would be hard. I'm not used to trying to figure my problems out by myself.*

What Does The Future Hold?

Freda: *To be honest with you, I want to be a hygienist and I see that happening. I don't know how soon. I'm only 26. I'm going to work it little by little and if I make it by the time I'm 30 or 35, I'll feel successful. For my children, I really want them to grow up with a sense of being responsible for their own actions and respectful of others and their elders. I want them to know that and have that instilled in them. I was teasing Tyrone for awhile there; he was running around trying on my heels, painting his nails. Whatever you choose to be or do, I love you.*

I don't want my children to go through the experience I went through experimenting with drugs. They have this disease whether they want it or not. We talked about what it was like then and what it is like now, in front of the children, and all the pain we went through. We talk openly about drugs and what happened to us. They hear other people talk about what drugs did to them. I don't want to scare them; I just want to let them know that this is what happened to me. I tell them we have this disease and it's genetic, like something that makes your eyes brown. It's like cancer; you can't help it. They can be and do whatever they want as long as they can live with the consequences.

I want to be married to Damon forever. I want to sit in a rocking chair in our house when we are old and gray and still be able to look at him and think he is very attractive and be completely in love with him. Tell our war stories to our grandchildren. We are at the point where we are so much in love. He calls me during the day. It's puppy love again and its been that way for the last two months. I just want our relationship to continue to change and grow, for us to stay in love. I don't see us falling out of love any time too soon.